

## Event Review

# Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex programming at the 31st International Congress of Psychology: Diversity in harmony

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THE 31st International Congress of Psychology (ICP) took place in Yokohama (Japan) from 24–29 July 2016. The theme of the congress was Diversity in Harmony: Insights from Psychology. The International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) sponsors the International Congress of Psychology (ICP) every four years. The ICP 2016 was a great success, bringing together a diverse set of international contributions. In a world of division, psychology and psychologists have the responsibility to study and promote harmony across different types of diversities, including racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, and sexual diversity, among others. It is important to explicitly address the scientific contributions of psychologists who study gender and sexual diversity because even in 2016, some local laws penalise gender and sexual minorities. For instance, the latest report of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) indicates that same-sex sexual acts remain illegal in 72 states (37 per cent of United Nation states) (ILGA & Carroll, 2016).

Debunking myths and promoting a scientific understanding of sexuality and diversity is one of the main responsibilities of psychologists. Thus, the objective of this review is to summarise the contributions to the ICP 2016 about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) issues. To provide a comprehensive overview of the different activities, we reviewed a total of 246 abstracts published in the *International Journal of Psychology* issue for ICP (2016) under the sections Sexuality, LGBTI ( $n=81$ )

(‘Sexuality, LGBTI,’ 2016), Gender and Sexuality ( $n=74$ ) (‘Gender and Sexuality,’ 2016), and (‘Diversity,’ 2016) ( $n=91$ ). Our selection criteria were as follows. We included abstracts that addressed L, G, B, T, or I issues, either independently or in different combinations. We also selected abstracts addressing Queer (Q) issues and issues such as androgyny or ‘X-Gender’ (a Japanese term similar to gender-queer). We extracted the information about the country and continent of origin and the main broad topic (e.g. Lesbian). When there were several countries participating in a symposium or thematic session, we classified the abstract based on the lead author’s affiliation. Following an initial screening, we retained all the abstracts in the ‘Sexuality, LGBTI’ section, 18 of the ‘Gender and Sexuality’ section, and 12 of the ‘Diversity’ section, for a total of 111 contributions. There was no overlap between the abstracts, so that each abstract is part of only one section. We present a summary of the ‘LGBTI, Sexuality’ section and a combination of the other two sections separately.

We identified two invited addresses related to LGBTI issues. The first one was a discussion of social categorisations (including ‘male’, ‘female’, ‘gay’, and ‘straight’) as not fitting all persons. The presenter suggested new directions for psychological inquiry (Marecek, 2016). The second invited address focused on the minority stress theory and resilience aspects to different areas of intervention, including legal aspects, educational strategies, policy issues, community services,

and the provision of culturally relevant information (Meyer, 2016).

The 'Sexuality, LGBTI' section included 13 sessions listed as contributed/invited symposia and thematic sessions (corresponding to a total of 50 presentations). LGBT issues (54 per cent) or LGBTI concerns (23 per cent) were the main topics addressed. The lead authors' affiliations were with organisations or universities in North America (62 per cent) or Asia (38 per cent). The range of topics included psychological associations supporting human rights (Schlittler & Anderson, 2016), LGBT mental health (Moreno, 2016), transgender health (Singh, 2016), LGBT parents (Sweeney, 2016), and issues specific to LGBTI people in East Asia (Suen, 2016). With regard to the presentations within the symposia or thematic sessions, most of them corresponded to LGBT (29 per cent), transgender issues (19 per cent), gay (12 per cent), or LGB concerns (12 per cent). Contributions focusing specifically on bisexuality (2 per cent) or lesbian concerns (4 per cent) were less frequently addressed. Interestingly, there were also contributions with heterosexual samples focusing mainly on attitudes toward LGBTI people or issues (8 per cent). Half of the presentations were from Asian authors (50 per cent), followed by authors from North America (30 per cent), Europe (16 per cent) and Africa (4 per cent). The content included the development and use of professional practice guidelines on sexual and gender diversity for psychologists in different countries (Jowett, 2016; Koch, Horne, Anderson & Schlittler, 2016; Victor, 2016), public attitudes toward LGBT people in China (Shen & Chang, 2016), LGBT-targeted counselling and health services in Thailand (Ojanen & Ratanashevorn, 2016), the transgender experience in Japan (Machida, 2016), lesbian mothers preparing their adolescents for homophobic stigmatisation in the Netherlands (Bos, Van Rijn-Van, Van De Bongardt & Gartrell, 2016), the reshaping of heteronormativity in the United Kingdom (Peel, 2016), the lives of Latino/a LGBT people (Heredia, Cerezo, Abreu & Aranda, 2016), and several health issues in LGBT people including smoking

(Smith, Obasi & Reitzel, 2016), self-injury (Dickey & Garza, 2016), suicide (Manalastas, 2016), and risky sexual behaviour (Moreno & McKerral, 2016).

The section corresponding to 'Sexuality, LGBTI' also included 31 individual oral and poster presentations. Of those, 68 per cent corresponded to works from Asia, 19 per cent came from Europe, and 13 per cent from North America. The main topics addressed focused on transgender concerns (20 per cent), LG issues (19 per cent), LGBT (16 per cent), or LGB topics (13 per cent). Following the same trend of the symposia and oral presentations, bisexual (3 per cent) or lesbian concerns (3 per cent) were less frequently addressed. The main topics included loneliness among rural gay and bisexual men in the United States (Hubach, Li & Dodge, 2016), the role of threat in sexual prejudice in the Netherlands (Mevisen, Schmitz, Pryor & Bos, 2016), the intersection of Jewish and transgender identity in Hungary (Ritter, 2016), attitudes towards bisexuals (Chen & Chang, 2016), the positive effects of 'coming out' in friendships in Taiwan (Wang, Wu & Shih, 2016), the effect of social support to reduce depressive symptoms among LGB adults who experienced homophobic violence in South Korea (Yi & Kim, 2016), the positive effect of an inclusive school climate on LGBT students in China (Wei & Liu, 2016), the results of a systematic review of LGBTQI studies in Korea (Lee & Kim, 2016), and the contrasts in India ranging from the stigmatisation of LGBT people by healthcare professionals (Satpathy, 2016) to the community support leading to the election of a transgender mayor (Jain, 2016).

We also looked at 165 abstracts of presentations in the 'Diversity' and 'Gender and Sexuality' sections, which we present together here. In the 'Diversity' section, there was one contributed symposium about the intersectionality frameworks in psychology (Rivera, 2016) and one thematic session (May, 2016) that gave only brief mention to LGB issues. With both of these sections combined, session topics focused on LGBT (50 per cent) or

LGB (50 per cent) issues. Lead presenters were from North America (50 per cent), Asia (25 per cent), and Africa (25 per cent). One invited symposium focused on gender and sexuality in India and China (Natu, 2016), while a thematic session focused on LGBT youth minority stress and health research (Schrager, 2016).

There were 24 oral presentations, poster presentations, and presentations included within the broader symposia and thematic sessions. Of these, 33 per cent addressed LGB issues. Other presentations focused exclusively on sub-populations such as transgender people (13 per cent) and gay men (13 per cent). Presentations addressing exclusively LG (4 per cent), LB (4 per cent), and intersex issues (4 per cent) were under-represented. No presentations focused exclusively on lesbian or bisexual issues. Presenters

came from North America (46 per cent), Asia (33 per cent), Africa (13 per cent), and Europe (8 per cent). The presentations in these sections represented a broad range of topics, from creative new ideas to LGBT issues in contexts/regions that are under-represented. For example, one presentation focused on the queer economy in two urban areas of China (Liu, 2016). Another presentation introduced 'Boys' Love' (Japanese comics that highlight romantic relationships between male heroes) and why heterosexual women enjoy them (Song & Rong, 2016). One poster presentation explored sexual orientation and violence in family of origin and intimate partner relationships in Costa Rica and Puerto Rico (Irizarry-robles, Serratailor, Jimenez-chafey & Villafane-Santiago, 2016). A summary of all the contributions by content area is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of all contributions by content area

Type of presentation	Content area(s)	Number of presentations
Invited address	Sexuality, LGBTI	0
	Diversity	0
	Gender and sexuality	2
Invited symposia	Sexuality, LGBTI	11
	Diversity	0
	Gender and sexuality	5
Contributed symposia	Sexuality, LGBTI	31
	Diversity	3
	Gender and sexuality	0
Thematic session	Sexuality, LGBTI	8
	Diversity	6
	Gender and sexuality	4
Oral presentation	Sexuality, LGBTI	23
	Diversity	1
	Gender and sexuality	6
Poster presentation	Sexuality, LGBTI	8
	Diversity	2
	Gender and sexuality	1
TOTAL	Asia (50%) North America (31%) Europe (14%) Africa (5%)	111

ICP 2016 also included two field visits organised by the International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Issues (IPsyNet). The first visit was to the SHIP rainbow cabin, which is a community centre in Yokohama offering different services, such as a walk-in centre, discussion groups, counselling services, and HIV testing and referral (Miyajima, Hoshino, Itoda & Hidaka, 2016). A second visit included the AKTA-LGBT community centre in Tokyo. AKTA provides services to LGBT people and to those who do not identify as LGBT. They provide prevention programming and education about HIV, sexually transmitted illnesses, and sexual health. Additionally, IPsyNet held an open meeting to invite psychological organisations around the world to actively get involved in their mission to increase the understanding of sexual orientation and gender diverse people and to promote their human rights and wellbeing (IPsyNet, 2016). The great success of the LGBTI programming at ICP was mainly due, among others, to the active role of IPsyNet in promoting LGBTI-related programming for the second time at ICP. IPsyNet worked with the conference organisers, prepared a program of LGBTI-related presentations, and offered international students and researchers travel support awards to encourage LGBTI-related submissions.

This review has some limitations. It is possible that some other contributions were submitted under other topic sections (e.g. culture, aging, clinical psychology, counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions, educational and school psychology, ethics, family and community, general, harassment and trauma, health psychology, human relationships, media and psychology, among others). Rapid communications submitted to the ICP (at a later date than the initial submission deadline) were not published with the other ICP abstracts in the *International Journal of Psychology* (Issue 51; 2016) and are not included here. There was also an exclusive section with presentations in Japa-

nese that we did not include in this review. For that reason, we may have not captured all of the abstracts addressing LGBTI concerns.

We suggest future directions and recommendations for other psychological meetings. For example, we hope that future presentations will include topics that were underrepresented in the 2016 ICP program, such as bisexual, lesbian, and intersex concerns. Based on the published abstracts and our own observations during the different presentations, research on transgender and bisexual parents, transgender men who become pregnant, miscarriage in lesbians and bisexual individuals, LGBTI older adults, and indigenous sexualities is still scarce. Those topics could be mentioned in future calls for abstracts. Also, we could not find contributions with the lead authors belonging to South America, Australia, or African countries (aside from South Africa). The Middle East region (Western region of Asia) was also underrepresented. It is important to promote the participation of these regions to provide a wider understanding of global LGBTI issues. Those countries face local challenges to promote LGBTI rights but the Americas and Europe are the regions in the world where most of the progress achieved in the global fight for legal LGBTI equality has been concentrated (ILGA & Carroll, 2016). We encourage the organisers of ICP and other international psychological meetings to create or maintain a section specific to LGBTI-related programming. We also recommend specifying in the guidelines for submission how LGBTI psychology is different from sexuality, gender, diversity, or culture. This will allow capturing and mapping LGBTI psychology in the future. More general recommendations include the need to create a journal to publish studies on LGBTI psychology in Japan, the use of information and communication technologies to reach wider audiences and deliver LGBTI educational materials, and the use of culturally appropriate materials to educate on LGBTI concerns. Future directions might also include looking at the experiences of

LGBTI people in international contexts (those who live, work, or study abroad from their nation of origin). From a public health perspective, we need more interventions to reduce disparities, to promote LGBTI health and to stop the targeted advertising of tobacco and alcohol to LGBTI people. To promote ethical practice, we should address the increasing training needs regarding LGBTI affirmative therapy in Asia, the development or adaptation of practice guidelines for psychologists working with LGBTI clients in more countries, the promotion of existing guidelines in countries that have developed them (IPsyNet, 2016), and the banning of conversion therapy. Psychology and psychologists must perform their professional activities within a framework of the respect of human rights. This human rights perspective, including LGBTI rights, clearly acknowledges the value of diversity and harmony as reflected in the theme and programming of the 2016 International Congress of Psychology.

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